

School-age sleep: what to expect

By school age, your child is probably sleeping through the night regularly without waking up. A good night's sleep is important for her growth, learning and development.



About sleep for school-age children

When your child sleeps well, he's more settled, happy and ready for school the next day. Good-quality sleep helps your child concentrate, remember things and behave well. This helps him to be a successful learner.

Getting enough sleep also strengthens your child's [immune system](#) and reduces the risk of infection and illness.

At this age children need **10-11 hours sleep a night**. They're usually tired after school and might look forward to bedtime from about 7.30 pm.

Some children fall deeply asleep very quickly when they go to bed. Others sleep lightly, fidgeting and muttering for up to 20 minutes, before getting into deep sleep. The first few hours of sleep are usually the most restful. Most dreams happen in the second half of the night. You can read more about [sleep patterns for children](#).

How to help children sleep well

A good night's sleep is about getting to sleep, staying asleep and getting enough good-quality sleep. Here are some ideas that can help your child get the sleep she needs.

Bedtime routine

A bedtime routine is very important at this age. It helps your child wind down from the day.

A bedtime routine might look like this:

- 6.45 pm: put on pyjamas, brush teeth, go to the toilet.
- 7.15 pm: quiet time in the bedroom with a book and a bedtime story or quiet chat.
- 7.30 pm: goodnight and lights out.

Relaxing before bed

After a big day at school, your child might still be thinking about many of the day's events and worries. If he's still thinking or worried when he goes to bed, it can cause a restless night or bad dreams.

You can help your child settle and [relax for sleep](#) by playing gentle music or a reading story together.

Good sleep habits

Your child might sleep better at night if she:

- keeps regular sleep and wake times, even on the weekend
- turns computers, tablets and TV off an hour before bedtime
- has a quiet and dimly lit place to sleep
- gets plenty of natural light during the day
- avoids caffeine in tea, coffee, sports drinks and chocolate, especially in the late afternoon.



Some [sleep problems](#) are behaviour issues that you can manage at home with [good sleep habits](#). It's a good idea to talk with your GP if you've been trying good sleep habits and they don't seem to be helping. [Sleep medications](#) usually aren't the solution to children's sleep problems.

Sleeptalking and sleepwalking

Many school-age children [sleeptalk](#), especially if they're excited or worried about an event like a holiday or a test. Sleeptalking is nothing to worry about. Calmly talking with your child about whatever is worrying him might help reduce sleeptalking.

[Sleepwalking](#) happens when your child's mind is asleep but her body is awake. It sometimes runs in families, and it can also be caused by anxiety or a lack of sleep. Sleepwalking usually doesn't need treatment, and most children grow out of it as teenagers.

Sleepwalking usually happens in the first few hours after falling asleep, when your child is in a deep sleep.

Bedwetting

[Bedwetting](#) happens when children don't wake up in the night when they need to do a wee. Some children wet the bed because they sleep very deeply. Other children wet the bed because they produce larger than usual amounts of wee at night, or because they have small bladders.

Children can't control bedwetting, and they almost always grow out of it. Reassure your child that **bedwetting is normal**. It might help to explain in simple terms some of the reasons for bedwetting.

It might be a good idea to see the GP if your child is still wetting the bed regularly at 7-8 years and:

- you're concerned about how your child will handle sleep-overs or overnight school camps
- bedwetting is starting to bother or worry your child.

Night terrors and nightmares

[Night terrors](#) are when your child suddenly gets very agitated while deeply asleep. They're less common than nightmares and usually disappear by puberty. Night terrors don't harm your child, who often won't remember them in the morning. But they can be scary for you. Night terrors usually happen in the first few hours after falling asleep.

[Nightmares](#) are very common in early school-age children, and nightmares are often scary enough to wake them up. As children get older, they get better at understanding that a dream is just a dream. By the age of seven, your child might be able to deal with nightmares without calling you for comfort. Nightmares happen often in the second half of the night, which is when your child dreams the most.

Teeth-grinding and thumb-sucking during sleep

Many children [grind their teeth](#) in their sleep. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with your child, and it usually doesn't cause damage.

Thumb-sucking can cause dental problems for children older than about five years.

If you're concerned about your child's teeth-grinding or thumb-sucking, talk to your dentist.

Obstructive sleep apnoea

If your child has [obstructive sleep apnoea](#), it means that he sometimes stops breathing when he's asleep. He might snore, pause or struggle while breathing at night. You might notice that your child seems tired during the day.

If you think your child has sleep apnoea, see your GP.



In children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), problems with sleep and settling can be more severe than in other children. For information and help, read our articles on [dealing with sleep problems in children with ASD](#) and [promoting good sleep habits in children with ASD](#).